

DEMOGRAPHIC GROWTH AND SHRINKAGE IN BELGIUM

Abstract

Although shrinkage has recently been presented as a new challenge for policymakers, there have always been shrinking and growing cities and regions. Especially in the period 1980-2000 many Belgian cities experienced population decline. Nonetheless, Belgium as a whole is

characterized as a growing country in comparison to other, mainly Eastern European countries. Nonetheless, shrinkage and growth go hand in hand. As cities shrink, the surrounding areas may grow and vice versa. The many faces of growth and shrinkage display a divers spatial pattern in demographic dynamics. Until now, only in very rural areas shrinkage was persistent, as the major cities

revitalized as reaction to renewed infrastructural investments (into renewal of railway stations, city centers, new shopping malls, etc.). The question if shrinkage will occur in Belgium on a broader scale is still unanswered. Therefor we will look at future demographic developments on a districts basis (Belgium) and a municipality level (Flanders).

Demographic forecasts

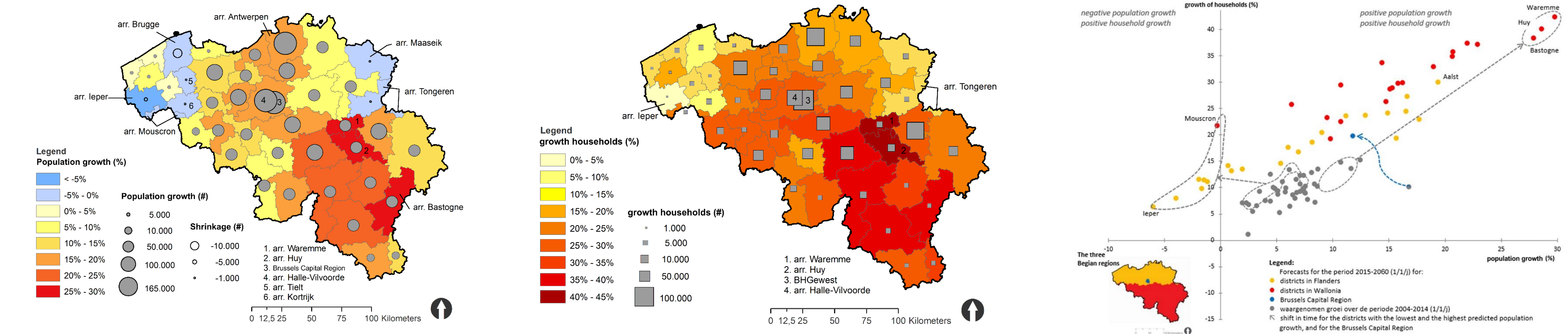


Figure 1
In general, population growth in Belgium is forecasted at 1.8 million inhabitants in the period 2015-2060, with a total population of 13 million in 2060. On the level of districts, only in Flanders will shrinkage be noticeable in the long term. In Flanders Fields (a very rural area) knows the greatest relative shrinkage, but is surpassed in numbers by the district of Bruges, which is much more urbanized.

Figure 2
When we investigate household growth, another picture comes to the front. Instead of shrinkage, overall growth is visible, although regional differences occur. All of the districts are growing, including all the large cities (e.g. Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Brussels Capital Region). This doesn't mean that there are no shrinking towns or cities.

Figure 3
In the past period (2004-2014), all districts had a positive population and household growth. In the period to come (2015-2060), especially Flemish districts (yellow dots) will know a shrinkage. At the same time some Walloon districts will know a strong growth as well in population as in households.

The many faces of growth and shrinkage

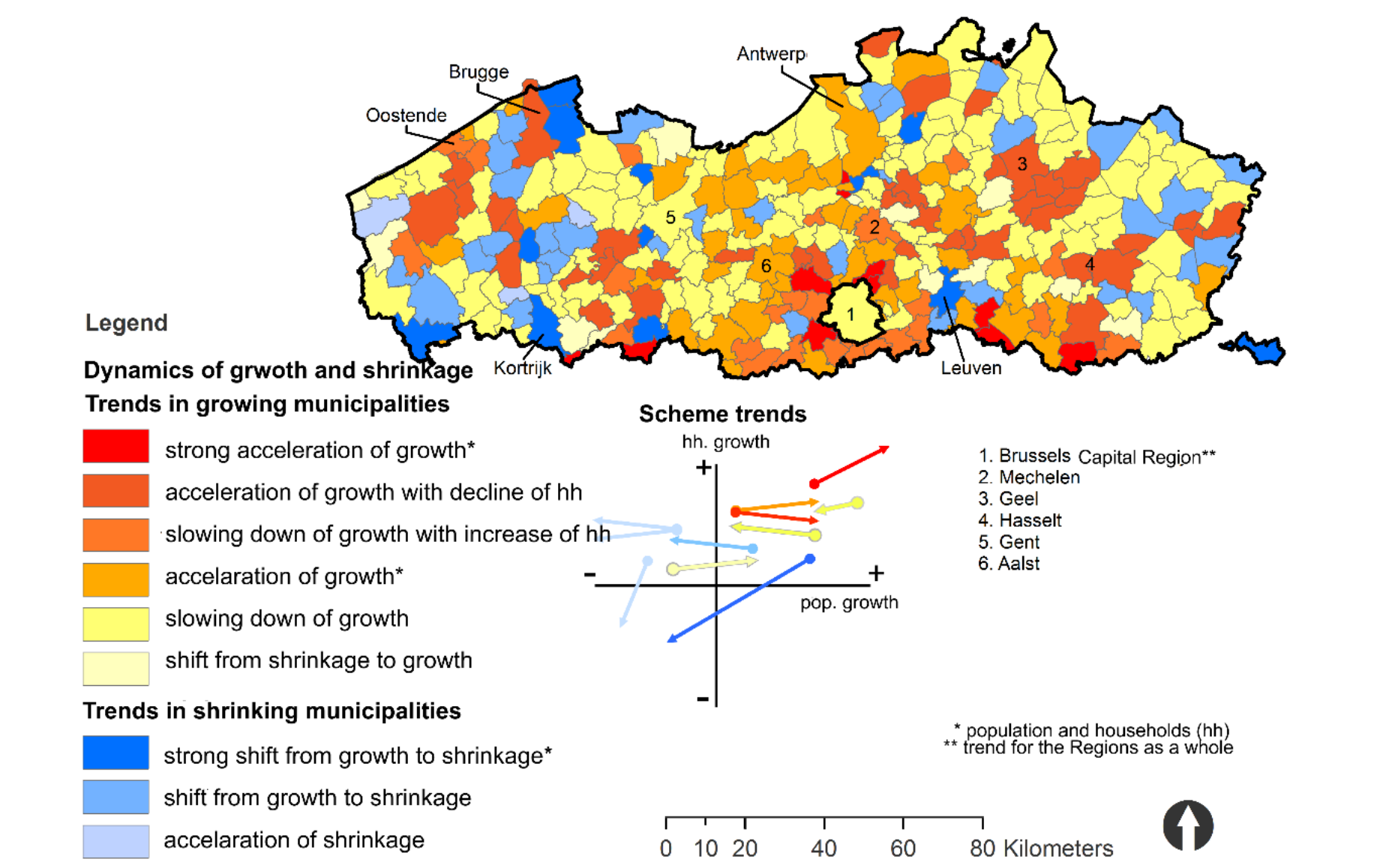


Figure 4
When we investigate trends on the municipal level, we can pinpoint those which know a population decline and a household decline (shrinking municipalities). In some cases the number of households can still increase. A few of these municipalities knew already a population decline in the past (2004-2014). Even more municipalities will know a shift from growth to shrinkage in the near future. Also the opposite trend occurs: a shift from shrinkage to growth in the future.

Trends and predominant types

Table 1
Municipalities differ by the prevalence of shrinkage (i.e. the number of times the city has experienced population decline), the persistence (how long population decline lasts) and severity (i.e. the number of inhabitants involved) . Overall there are two main trends and seven predominant types.

TRENDS	PREDOMINANT TYPE
1. Growth trend:	
1.1. Shift from shrinkage to growth:	
Population growth and household thinning: from limited population decline (max.-5%) to a moderate population growth (max. 15%) and an increasing growth of the number of households	Rural area (e.g. Geetbets)
1.2. Acceleration of growth:	
Population growth and thinning of household size: from a low growth (<10%) to a moderate growth (>15%) of population and households	Rural area (e.g. Spiere-Helkijn)
Population growth and thinning of household size: moderate increase of population growth (<15%) and moderate increase in the number of households (<20%)	Inner city, suburban areas and rural areas (e.g. Lochristi)
Population growth and thinning of household size: strong increase of population (>20%) and strong increase of the number of households (>20%)	Inner city and suburban areas (e.g. Vilvoorde)
1.3. Slowing down of growth:	
Strong population growth and strong household growth decline modestly	Rural area (e.g. Opwijk)
2. Shrinking trend:	
2.1. Shift from growth to shrinkage:	
Remarkable shift of population growth (+%) to population decline (-%) and decrease of household growth (-%)	Inner city (limited number of cases) (e.g. Leuven)
2.2. Acceleration of shrinkage:	
Population decline and household decline: status quo or already decline of population (-%) is to be enhanced (-%) and coincides with a decline of the number of households (-%)	Inner-cities, urban fringes, urban peripheral landscapes, rural areas (e.g. Voeren)

Spatial dynamics

When we zoom to Flanders, the norther part of Belgium, and look at the population and household forecasts on the level of municipalities and for the midterm (2015-2030), a less distinctive but more fine-grained pattern occurs. This shows that shrinkage and growth are as well rural as urban phenomenon. Four cases occur. First, there are the cities which grow with their shrinking fringes (e.g. Antwerp), second, there are cities that grow like their fringes doe, third, there are cities which shrink like their fringes, and forth, there are shrinking cities with their growing fringes (e.g. Kortrijk – doughnut effect).

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